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Wasatch County Attorney gets Watson case

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Wasatch County Attorney Steven L. Hansen has been appointed special prosecutor in the drug investigation against Salt Lake County Commissioner Dave Watson.

Hansen will handle any drug charges that may arise as a result of Watson's arrest Sunday, said Salt Lake County Attorney David Yocom, who excused his own office from the case to avoid the appear-

ance of a conflict of interest.

Yocom and Watson are both Democrats, and Watson has a vote on Yocom's budget.

Hansen, a Republican who was elected county attorney in 1986, has extensive experience in criminal law, Yocom said.

Watson, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for re-election in this Saturday's county convention, was stopped after South Salt Lake Police Officer Elaine Chapman

noticed a car traveling erratically near the Salt Lake County Government Complex on State Street about 3:40 a.m. Sunday.

When she searched the commissioner she found a small vial that contained less than a gram of alleged cocaine, according to a field test conducted by police.

The substance has been turned over to the State Crime Laboratory for further testing.

A toxicology report on the substance should be available by Monday, said South Salt Lake City Attorney Clint Balmforth.

Balmforth is prosecuting Watson on a city drunken driving charge filed Tuesday. He said South Salt Lake police will screen the toxicology report with Hansen, who will decide whether there is enough probable cause to charge Watson with drug possession.

"Mr. Hansen will have the

sole discretion in the prosecution and any drug charges that may be filed as a result of Mr. Watson's arrest," Yocom said.

Watson said Wednesday he felt re-election in November is impossible, but he would like to finish this term.

County Commission Chairman Bart Barker, a Republican, said there have been a number of calls to the office calling for Watson's resignation.

Barker said he had taken a half dozen and another 18 were summarized in notes left by staff members. Most were anonymous.

"Let's make sure callers understand you don't work for Commissioner Watson and they are speaking with our office," Barker said in a memo to his staff.

Elaine Carter, Watson's secretary, said she had taken about 50 calls, most of them supporting Watson.